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Pike, Otis

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Truth should get out, Pike believes

WASHINGTON—The greatest peril facing the U.S. is the growing feeling among Americans that the government is not telling them the truth, Rep. Otis Pike (D.-N.Y.) told a breakfast meeting of the National Newspaper Assn. Government Affairs Conference.

Pike, chairman of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, said the practice of government rubber stamping information as secret has given rise to the feeling that the public can't be trusted with the truth. In turn, the public looks at Congress with a skeptical eye, Pike believes.

PIKE'S COMMITTEE, which has been studying U.S. intelligence operations, gained no small amount of notoriety recently when its report—which Congress voted be kept from the public—was leaked to the Village Voice by CBS correspondent Daniel Schorr.

Pike said his committee voted nine to four in favor of releasing the report, but that Congress voted against its publication.



Otis Pike

PIKE SAID THE report contains nothing that would jeopardize U.S. intelligence operations. He said it was a study to determine how the intelligence system operates and if the costs of the system justified its results. In that context, Pike explained, his committee focused on how good U.S. intelligence was in predicting, among others, such foreign operations as the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam, the coup in Cyprus and the last Arab-Israeli war. He said his committee uncovered information that U.S. intelligence

knew of these operations in advance, but no one in power believed them.

Pike said in each incident his committee studied where U.S. intelligence was in a position to have advance knowledge of foreign operations, it failed. This led his committee to conclude that the U.S. foreign intelligence operations are expensive, risky, and "not terribly effective."

THE COMMITTEE chairman said he was "personally outraged" when the House voted against releasing the report. He noted

that many members read the report only after casting their votes. Some told him that had they read the report first, they would have favored its release.

The public, Pike said, has a constitutional right to know what was in the report, as well as much of the information now being kept from them under the stamp of secrecy. He advocated a "short shelf life" for many of these secrets.

While he acknowledged that there is a valid need for legislation to protect secrecy in government, it must go hand in hand with mechanisms to make illegal acts public knowledge.

AFTER EXAMINING THE way U.S. intelligence works, Pike said, he believes there is a need for covert operations. But he would bar assassinations, paramilitary operations in peacetime, and the use of journalists as intelligence operators.

In response to a question, the congressman said the decision of what should remain secret should not be left in the hands of the executive branch. He said there are 15,000 members of that branch with the power to wield the "secret" stamp. Congress, he said, should be a coequal branch of government when it comes to making such decisions.

Addressing his audience of newspaperpeople specifically, Pike told them they had a "tremendous burden to bear" in weighing what should be made public and what should be withheld. "My belief," he said, "is that for the long haul, printing the truth is always better than suppressing it."